

# Idy Ciss





## Biography

**Idy Ciss** comes to us from Senegal. He credits his grandparents with his natural dance ability. They were well known in their village for their dancing, and it was from them that he received this gift. From the time he was five years old, he was always called upon to perform for special occasions and ceremonies. He credits the love and support of his family and neighbors as the catalyst, which led him to the field of professional dance.

Idy is also a teacher and singer of traditional African songs. His professional debut was with Les Ballets Africains Kolaam Serere. He is also a former member of Ballets Africains. He has performed before presidents of several African countries and appeared on national television in Senegal.

Idy is now a full time member of Muntu offering his expertise as a consultant, choreographer and principal dancer. Idy teaches West African Dance at festivals throughout North America and provides classes at the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago, Lycee Francais de Chicago, Soulistic Studio & Spa, and Joel Hall Dance Center.

Idy was recently awarded The Joseph Holmes Award for Best Choreography in a Music/Dance Program for choreography of Dekkal Thiossane (Rebirth of Culture) by the Black Theater Alliance Awards.

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# Artist Statement

As a West African dancer, singer and choreographer of Sereer origin, I see my role as a connector, a sharer of traditions and revealer of roots and ties that connect peoples across time, cultures and boundaries. The Sereer and Jola people of West Africa are acknowledged as the oldest people in the Senegambia region and the creators of the Sabar drum, its style of music and dance. Rhythm is our heart beat and central to my work. It is language, was and is still used to call and convene people, remind us of our commonalities, and communicate across distances. Though distances may be more figurative now, rhythm still calls to people—especially groups with strong oral traditions. In my work, rhythm is cultural DNA, encoded and full of the fundamental, basic characteristics of its people. If rhythm is the call, dance is the response. Within many West African contexts, dance is egalitarian. Everyone dances, participates, and is in relationship with each other. Add to this the spoken word, the masquerade or adornment and the tradition is complete.

My art and work is firmly grounded in this West African aesthetic, and consistently seeks to create opportunities to bring people into relationship with each other. My approach does not take differences lightly, but illuminates uniqueness and critical issues that make us different and alike. In this way I am invested in transforming lives and bringing new context to traditional and contemporary dance, audiences, and art creators.



## Artistic Collaborations

Through his work in Senegal, the United States and Europe, Idy has been grounded in collaborations and working with artists from different cultural backgrounds.



### Kayy Fecc

*(Come Dance, Wolof)*

Idy created a caravan of dance in collaboration with Arika Ochoa. Their blend of African and Arab expression, song, dance and instrumental music explored North and West African culture.



The most diverse and inspiring line-up yet. Indian, African, flamenco and modern music and dance come together in a very special presentation..Senegalese dancer **Idy Ciss** will lead an ensemble of rhythm and movement from the West African tradition. The evening will close with a Las Guitarras de España original work entitled "Music and Movement." **The Chicagoist, September 2011.**





## Major Works

### **Dekkal Thioossane** (Rebirth of Culture)

**Dekkal Thioossane**, a full-length piece that explores the origin of contemporary movement and other art forms and their connections to West African culture, was awarded The Joseph Holmes Award for Best Choreography in a Music/Dance Program for choreography by the Black Theater Alliance Awards.

### **Together We Are Stronger**

Curated by Idy Ciss, **Together We Are Stronger** is an evening of music, dance and song and features kora player Morikeba Kouyate, percussionists Aly Mbaye and Alioune Sarr, and more. This work celebrates the oral traditions of West Africa.

### **Sabar**

Choreographed by Idy Ciss, **Sabar**, the name of a family of drums and associated dances, is inspired by a Senegalese Independence Day celebration. *A non-stop onslaught of frenzied solos, feverish leg work and multicolored, often orange-hued costumes. An unrelenting show piece* --Sid Smith, Tribune Arts Critic. Chicago Tribune

### **Roff**

A collaboration by Idy Ciss and Amaniyea Payne, **Roff**, the Wolof word for a blend of spices used in Senegalese cuisine, is a signature piece of the *Spice It Up* performance. *Very contemporary, very American movement, as if single frames from Beyoncé's or Rihanna's videos are spliced into Senegalese Bougarabou and Sabar.* LIVE REVIEW - TIME OUT CHICAGO BY ZACHARY W HITTENBURG